

2009 Holiday Sermon Series
“Where is He?”
Pastor Dale Campfield – Eastgate Community Church
Christmas Sunday: December 20th, 2009

Intro:

Matt 28:19 “Go and make disciples of all nations...”

ECC Process of Discipleship: Making an IMPACT...To Love...To Grow...To Serve

We have 3 priorities – To love...which is expressed in our Sunday morning celebration and connection groups. To grow...which is expressed in our Path to Discipleship. To serve...which is expressed in our daily lives in the places we live, work and play; as well as through the local church. The vision of E.C.C. is to gather together weekly for corporate worship, loving God and each other; then to come together in small Connection Groups for discipleship and fellowship, and are regularly involved in reaching out to others with the love, acceptance, and forgiveness of Jesus Christ through community outreach. To Love...To Grow...To Serve!

Today, we will continue with the “2009 Holiday Sermon Series” with...

“Where is He?”

Christmas is in five days. In five days the world will be celebrating the Christmas holiday.

Can you hear the sound of Christ in Christmas or is it all just Christmas noise?

It is that time of the year again, & all around us are the sights & sounds of Christmas. The Christmas Parade in Amelia last Sunday afternoon, the holiday decorations, the crowded stores & shopping centers, & even the traffic congestion, all remind us that Christmas is near.

Bells will soon be ringing, choirs singing, & Christmas music filling the air. In fact, if you listen carefully, you might even hear some Christmas classics like "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus," & "All I Want For Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth." Those were the great ones, weren't they?

Introduction – sing “Nuttin’ For Christmas” (Roy Bennett & Sid Tepper, © 1955 Intersong Music) (have congregation join in on “somebody snitched on me” and the chorus) I broke my back on Johnny’s head; somebody snitched on me. I hid a frog in sister’s bed; somebody snitched on me. I spilled some ink on Mommy’s rug, I made Tommy eat a bug. Bought some gum with a penny slug; somebody snitched on me. Oh...

I’m getting nuttin’ for Christmas. Mommy and Daddy are mad. I’m getting nuttin’ for Christmas. ‘Cause I ain’t been nuttin’ but bad. I won’t be seeing Santa Claus; somebody snitched on me. He won’t come visit me because; somebody snitched on me. Next year I’ll be going straight, next year I’ll be good, just wait. I’d start now, but it’s too late; somebody snitched on me. Oh... I’m getting nuttin’ for Christmas. Mommy and Daddy are mad. I’m getting nuttin’ for Christmas. ‘Cause I ain’t been nuttin’ but bad.

For some, this is the theme song of their Christmas season. In it we find the theology of Santa Claus, the practice commercialism, and the system of rewards instead of giving that this holiday is all about. But it doesn’t make it any less fun to sing!

Of course, it’s not just music that we hear. Our airwaves are filled with the clamor of commercials for products we simply must buy for Christmas. In fact, we hear so many of these sounds that soon they just become noise to us.

That is my concern this morning - that we may become so overwhelmed by the noises of Christmas, that we’ll never hear the sounds of that first Christmas night we really ought to hear - the sounds of a noisy inn, & of a mother’s lullaby. We hear the noise of Christmas, but there seems to be no Christ within the noise.

Many of the activities that surround Christmas are...

- Buying the perfect Christmas Tree
- Putting Up Lights outside the house
- Traveling to see family
- Eating Ham and Tacos
- Opening Christmas Presents
- Watching Football
- SNOW!
- Eggnog
- Charlie Brown Christmas TV Special
- Stockings hung by the fire (with hopes that Saint Nick soon will be there)

*Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St Nicholas soon would be there.*

But we are busy avoiding the real point of it all. The world will celebrate Christmas without ever worshipping or meditating on the real meaning of this special season. Christmas is no longer a Christian holiday. We have it all planned. Every minute is so full. The holiday will come and go and many will have done all their shopping with no consideration for the reason behind the season. They will go to parties where Christ's name will never be mentioned and the real meaning of the season will be completely avoided.

In a culture which is increasingly secularized, there are many people who have no clue about what it all means. A person gave a Bible to someone who was going through a difficult time. The person was in real need, and their life had been one disaster after the other, but in all that time there was never any concrete attempt to give their life to God and follow him. As that person gave a Bible to this person, and encouraged him to read it, he suggested that he might start by reading the Christmas story, since it was that time of year. The man looked at him with real surprise and said: "You mean the Christmas story is in the Bible?" For those of us who know what the Christmas story is and have read and heard the Christmas story many times from Scripture, it seems incredible that someone would not know something that basic. But there is a growing ignorance of spiritual things in our land as we attempt to separate our lives from the any contact with, or reference to, God.

Christmas in the eyes of the world is combing the stores in frustration. It is fighting someone for the latest action figure or fashion doll. It's getting trampled in a stampede at Walmart at 6:00 in the morning. It is baking cookies, making candy, and roasting hams. It is searching the Christmas tree lots for just the right tree. It is listening to dogs barking to the tune of "Jingle Bells," or Brenda Lee singing "Jingle Bell Rock." It is going to a party where once again you will sing The Twelve Days of Christmas. It is wondering how you can get what you want for everyone and still be able to buy groceries in January. It is rushing and running to get it all done.

The world has tried to take a Christian holy day and gut it of its real meaning while trying to keep the wonder and joy of it. It comes across as exceedingly hollow and shallow to those of us whose lives have been transformed by the reality of that story. We have heard again this year the controversies surrounding Christmas. The Christ-child is being asked to leave more and more places. But isn't that the reality of Christmas? A child is born into the world and the world ignores him at best and turns its hostility on him at worst. At the time of the first Christmas he was unwelcome, and many wanted to destroy him and erase his name from the earth. Not much has changed, and it is in keeping with the spirit of the first Christmas. Many now misinterpret our laws to mean that it is not legal to mention his name. His teachings are still regarded as dangerous. We are supposed to celebrate Christmas, but we are not supposed to remember why. And we find that Christ is just as unwelcome in our world today as he was when he was born. He is just as

unwelcome in the Inns of America as he was the Inn at Bethlehem. People are still offended at him. People still reject him. People still try to forget him and ignore his presence. It is easier to just pretend he never came and does not exist. Christmas cards are decorated with birds, candles, snow, everything but Christ. Their message carefully avoids any mention of the One whom Christmas is all about.

Don't you want to ask the world the question: "What are you so afraid of?" There is not this kind of reaction to the story and life of any other religious leader in the world, why so much hostility toward Jesus? The answer is because the story is true, and the world has always understood that Christ is dangerous. He is not just a religious leader among many, he is the only Son of God. He is unique. He is Emmanuel, God who came to us in human form. And to recognize that means that everything must be different. It means that God is in search of me and that I have a responsibility toward him. It means that God has a claim upon my life, and that determines how I am to think and live. It means that I can no longer live just for myself, I am obligated to live for God. It means I have to recognize a higher authority than myself and surrender to that authority. That is why the world is afraid. This is why the scripture says, "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (John 1:10-11).

The world should be afraid of him, for in spite of all the attempts to destroy him, he is the ruler of heaven and earth. He has overcome the world and will judge the world on that final day. Give him an inch and he will take the universe. He is Lord of all. And that is what causes the world to take offense at him. It is as the scripture says, when it refers to Christ as the cornerstone on which all life is built: "Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,' and, 'A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.' They stumble because they disobey the message. . . ." (1 Peter 2:7-8).

How much has been lost since that first Christmas day. The simplicity. The sacredness. The wonder of it all. The realization of God's wonderful gift. God who became man. He is laid down in hay in the middle of a dirty stable when he had just come from the magnificence of his heaven. He came from being worshiped and adored by all the hosts of heaven to be spit on by the world. Later he would be hated and crucified by the world he came to save. He is still unwelcome in many places in our land. Many hearts still offer him no room. To many he is just as much a stranger as then. His welcome is no better. He is still looked on with suspicion and hostility by the world.

The problem is that it is so easy to get sidetracked into thinking of Christmas as something else. The merchants measure the success of Christmas by their margin of profit and how it compares to other years. Mothers measure it by how much of the family was able to be together. Fathers think about its cost, and whether they spent more or less than last year. The police think in terms of how much crime there was in comparison with other seasons past. The highway patrol measures it by the number of accidents and fatalities on the highway. The mailman is thinking in terms of how many people decided to send letters and cards this year. The kids measure it by how many days they get out of school and whether or not they got the gifts they wanted.

How do you measure Christmas? Is it just a welcome break in the monotony of the world? A holiday hiatus? Is it just a lot of work? Or is it him? He is the reason for the season. Are we wanting more of him? Are we wanting God's gift more than anything else? Have we centered our lives around him, and given ourselves to him. Do we take time for him, worship him, and remember the sacrifice he made in order to come to us?

Did you notice how many people now days are saying "Happy Holiday" instead of "Merry Christmas"? Where is Jesus in Christmas? Christmas over the years has become so commercialized that Christ has been left out of it in many different ways. I ask you today, "Where is He?"

I propose to you this morning, that He is within us! We are the hands, feet and mouth piece of Jesus Christ. If people are looking for answers in their lives; they should be able to see Christ, who lives in us, to find the hope that need.

Where is He? He's living within us.

So... what are we going to do about it, knowing that He is living with us? We MUST do something about it! People are looking for answers! People are looking for something or someone to satisfy their need. People desire for their needs to be met. People are hurting with sin and sickness. People are hurting everywhere you look.

There are 2,000 verses of Scripture that call upon us to respond to the needs of the poor. This is at the core of the Christian faith.

You see scriptures like **Pr 19:17** NLT

If you help the poor, you are lending to the LORD — and he will repay you!

Pr 14:31 TLB

Anyone who oppresses the poor is insulting God.

Pr 21:13 NLT

Those who shut their ears to the cries of the poor will be ignored in their own time of need.

Let me read you another one.

1 John 3:17 NIV

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

The answer is, it can't. What this is saying is, if you have no compassion for the poor, you're really not a Christian, because the love of God is not in you,

Or if you are a Christian, then at the very least, you have hardened your heart toward God in this area. Because God tells us 2,000 times in the Bible how a Christian reacts to the poor. A Christian has compassion, and helps them.

Illus: **Mr. and Mrs. Potato Head**

How many of you remember playing with Mr. and Mrs. Potato Head? We use to have him as kids and really enjoyed playing with him. My grandmother always had one; to which we loved mixing and matching him. You can make him happy or sad, evil or nice, with a hat and without, etc. etc. etc. They can wear a mask or make you think whatever they want you think about them. All of us are just like Mr. and Mrs. Potato Head. Did you know that Mr. Potato Head was the first toy to be advertised on television?

What do we know about potatoes?

My grandfather use to grow potatoes, then my father did later. We had a spud cellar where we would sell them to the local people on the reservation. We called them SPUDS.

Here are a few facts about SPUDS.

Potatoes came out of the Andes Mountains of South America. They were noticed because of their ability to grow in tough climates, up to 15,000 feet, and in poor soil condition.

It wasn't until 1537 that Western man came in contact with the potato when the Conquistadors tramped through Peru. And in 1570 that it made its way across the Atlantic to make its start in Europe. And in 1719 made their first appearance in North America in Londonderry, New Hampshire with the Irish.

The early potatoes were considered food for the poor and under classed. They were used primarily to feed hospital inmates. Part of its bad reputation was that the potato is a member of the nightshade family and its leaves are poisonous. When left in the sun a potato will turn green with Solanine which causes a bitter taste and can cause illness in humans.

Antoine Augustine Parmentier, a chemist and pharmacist, overcame the potatoes bad rap for the French when he acquired a miserable and unproductive spot of ground outside of Paris. There, he planted 50 acres of potatoes. During the day, he set a guard over it. This drew considerable attention in the neighborhood. In the evening the guard was relaxed and the locals came to see what all the fuss was about.

Believing this plant must be valuable, many peasants "stole" some of the potatoes from the plot, and soon were growing the root in their own garden plots.

Curiosity overcame their resistance and today the potato is a major food stuff of the world. Coming in brown, yellow, pink, red, and purple or "blue". My grandpa Lew use to grow red, white and blue SPUDS in the shape of an American Flag so those who flew above could see the flag. Tough to see though for the stems are pretty much the same; but there is a slight tint of the color.

And containing a fistful of nine healthy vitamins: so common, plentiful that the potato is taken for granted in our Western world.

- Vitamin C 45%
- Thiamin 10%
- Niacin 8%
- Vitamin B6 14%
- Folacin 14%
- Panthothenic Acid %
- Phosphorous 6%
- Magnesium 12%
- Iron 9%

As we approach this Christmas season, knowing that Christ lives within, and we are the hands and feet of Christ, let's look at the word SPUD. SPUDS offer a lot to the world. We too have a lot to offer the world.

This Christmas – Remember, we are SPUDS for Christ!

S – IS FOR SERVICE

In his book, *The Jesus Style*, **Gayle D. Erwin** described servanthood this way:
"A servant's job is to do all he can to make life better for others –
to free them to be everything they can be."

"A servant's first interest is not in himself but others ...
Servanthood is a loving choice we make to minister to others."

God has called us to service. We are not to be in this world for ourselves. But to serve others. We are not called by God to be inward focused, but outward focused, serving others.

Jesus admonished Peter three times. Feed my Lambs Take care of my sheep. Feed my sheep in **John 21:15-17**. **Proverbs 29:7** The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.

Matthew 10:42 Jesus said: If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.

Matthew 25:40

"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

If God has blessed you with resources and you must use them to serve others.

I'd like you to listen to this testimony by Jenny Beard, a woman in our church at EASTGATE who has the heart of a servant and how she has used her vocation in cutting and designing hair to serve.

TESTIMONY: Jenny Beard

CS Lewis put it this way,

"The rule for all of us is fairly simple: do not waste time bothering whether you love your neighbor; act as if you did.

P – IS FOR PURPOSE

P – IS FOR PURPOSE

Service without a purpose is wasted effort. You must serve with a purpose. What is that purpose.... To be the hands, feet and mouthpiece of God Almighty – sharing His LOVE. The purpose is to LOVE others!

Mark 9:37

“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcome me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

We can give a cup of water. We can clothe the naked. We can even have our bodies burned in protest of something we think important. But without a purpose connected to the kingdom of God, it's wasted effort. A noisy gong or clanging cymbal

When you serve others, serve them in the love of Christ. Become tools where we share the kingdom of God. We don't just feed a person physically. Jesus said the poor you have with you always. But to give to have opportunity to share a relationship with Jesus. We give clothes, money, jobs and a hands up in Jesus name. To help others come to know Jesus as we know him! That they can experience His love through us.

Paul said this in **Romans 1:16**:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

John 10:10 - The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

U – IS FOR UNITY

I use to pick potatoes on the farm during the harvest season. At that time, we picked them by hand. It took a lot of time and effort. One person by themselves, it would take forever to pick the entire field. However, united effort can clean a field quickly, making it possible to get the SPUDS out to those in need quicker.

When we join together we become a great force for the kingdom of God. The church united will never fail. But when were caught alone, like Peter in the courtyard and the world crowds around us. Fear abounds, faith fails and all it takes is a little waitress, or cleaning lady to take us down.

It's time for the body of Christ to stand up, united as one, with the sole purpose of serving the world; the world that is looking for Jesus Christ. The body of Christ, no matter where they live, worship, work, play, etc. We must be the body of Christ! No walls, no denominations, nothing to keep us from walking united and being THE CHURCH!

WE NEED ALL OF US UNITED IN MISSION.

Philippians 1:27

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel...”

D – IS FOR DEPLOYMENT

We all know what the meaning of this word is: Shortly, 37,000 of our men and women who serve in the military will be deployed to Afghanistan by order of President Obama. That means they will report for duty. But more than that they will actually move out.

And move into the world of danger where our troops are needed in the Middle East.

To maintain and assure that the Afghanistan people have a chance at freedom and democracy. Do we like war? No? Can we sit by and watch the world persecute and destroy people? No. We are called to lay down our lives for others.

In regards to the spiritual battle that is taking place, we are deployed in the name of Christ. We must deploy. And we must deploy for those who are hurting, looking for Christ, looking for answers to their needs.

A one-legged school teacher by the name of George Scott came to J. Hudson Taylor to offer himself for service in China. Taylor ask him: "With only one leg, why do you think you can go as a missionary?" George Scott replied: "Because, I do not see those with two legs going," And he was accepted for mission to China.

On the farm our family would gather for dinner and Dad would talk with us about bailing hay. But in morning dad would deploy us. We talked about pulling weeds and changing the sprinklers. But in the morning Dad deployed us to do it. It didn't matter the smell.

It didn't matter the heat. It didn't matter the dirt. We did it - we were deployed.

We Christian must step up where we're needed. IT takes more than talking about tithing. IT takes more than talking about mission. Its takes us willing to deploy with action.

1 Thessalonians 2:8 says that...

"We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but OUR LIVES AS WELL!"

Unless we deliver the potatoes, give to the poor, help the needy, serve others, they won't do anyone any good. We must go all the way through.

Conclusion:

WHAT KIND OF SPUD ARE YOU TODAY?

With a smile upside down and heart that empty?
No joy, no plan in life.

Or maybe a devious heart that's cold, and biting?
Or just Clowning around to avoid that which is serious?

Christ wants us to have a face with a smile.
A heart full of Joy
And Hands full of service for children of God.

Where is Christ this Christmas? He's in us!

It's time to SPUD....

Serve, Purpose, Unity, Deploy!

And as we do..... You watch... you wait... you'll SEE!

EXTRA CHRISTMAS FUN

On the day after Christmas at a church in San Francisco, the pastor was looking over the nativity scene in the church lobby and noticed that baby Jesus was missing from among its figures. He hurried outside and saw a little boy with a red wagon, and in the red wagon was the figure of the little infant Jesus. So he walked up to the boy and said, "Well, where did you get your passenger, my friend?" The little boy replied, "I got Him at church." Pastor: "Why did you take Him?" The boy looked up at the pastor and said, "Well, about a week before Christmas I prayed to the little Lord Jesus and told Him if He would bring me a red wagon for Christmas I would give Him a ride around the block in it."